

THE
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Arbitrio popularis auræ. Hor.

Influenced by the air of Popularity.

To the Author of the Country Spectator.

Sir,

DURING the whole of my life I have studied the arts of pleasing. When I have had reason to think myself popular among my acquaintance, my spirits have been elated, and I have been all mirth, joy and extacy ; but when I have observed my friends cool or indifferent towards me, I have been depressed to melancholy and despair.

I REMEMBER perfectly well, tho' it is many years ago, what uneasiness I felt at College, when I heard of a wine-party or supper, to which I had not been invited. Tho' I did not love wine half so well as my books, I never on these occasions could read a single page; so deeply did the sense of neglect prey upon my mind. How often have I,

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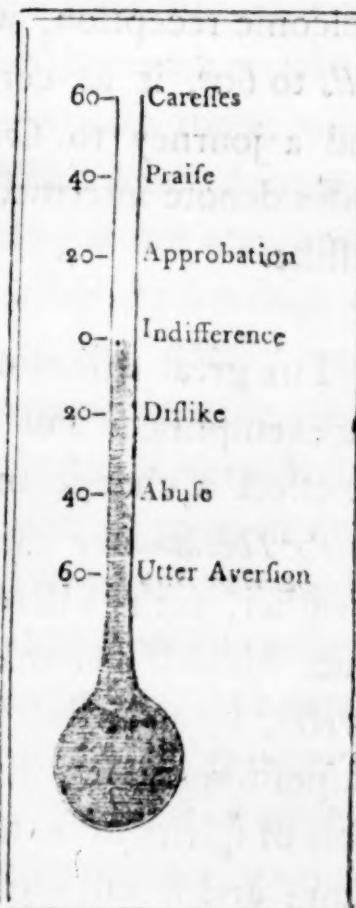
tortured with mortification, immured myself in my room, and felt all the horrors of a hypocondriac ! How often, animated with the smiles of a fellow-commoner or nobleman, have I enjoyed the dream of self-importance, and discovered to a numerous company the gaiety of my heart ! Ever since I settled in the world, I have derived my pains and pleasures from the same sources as before : I have been happy in proportion as I have been noticed, and miserable according as I have been neglected.

My greatest care, therefore, has been to observe with minuteness and diligence, the several symptoms of increasing and declining popularity. I know by the air of a person, whom I meet in the street, the precise degree of his good-will towards me : I can discover esteem, tho' hid under a cloud of frowns, and I can discern malice and mischief, when disguised with smiles.

No man, I believe, is willing to suppose himself a solitary instance of the operation of those passions, by which he himself is governed. Accordingly, I doubt not but the world abounds with characters similar to my own. It is possible, however, that many of those, who come under the same description of persons with myself, may not be so deeply versed in the several prognostics of favor and disaffection. To such I wish to communicate, thro' the medium of your Paper, the invention of a machine

that will enable them to discover the exact degree of estimation, in which they are held by their acquaintance, without the trouble and anxiety of perpetual observation, or the inexpressible fatigue of decyphering countenances. It is called the *Thermometer of Popularity*, and agrees in many respects with the well-known instrument, which is used to ascertain the changes in the atmosphere. The scale is graduated; but the plan will, perhaps, be best understood by the help of a figure, and I doubt not but your ingenious Printer will be able to insert it.

It would be impolitic in me to publish to the world several of the particulars respecting the construction of this machine; such as the chemical process used in procuring the fluid, the causes of its ascent and descent in the tube, &c. &c. as it would set enterprising geniuses at work, to the great injury and loss of the original inventor and sole proprietor. It will be sufficient, if I explain its properties and give instances of its great utility.



My Thermometer, then, is designed to ascertain the degrees of heat and cold in the “*aura popularis*,” or atmosphere of Popularity. By the bye, it is evident from my motto, that the Ancients had some idea of the existence of such an atmosphere, tho’ it seems not to have been made the object of philosophical experiments by any person before myself. The quantity of fluid put into the tube is such, as originally to stand exactly at the *point of indifference*: but when the instrument comes to be used, the fluid will occasionally rise or fall, and will very seldom be at rest. When it is so high as 60°, the owner of the Thermometer may be certain of a very warm and welcome reception, wherever he goes: but when it falls to 60°, it as certainly betokens cold weather and a journey to *Coventry*. The intermediate altitudes denote intermediate degrees of approbation or dislike.

THE great utility of this machine needs hardly to be exemplified. For tho’ it will contribute no more to effect a change in one’s popularity, than *Farenheit’s Thermometer* can produce an alteration in the weather, yet it will teach the user of it how to conduct himself towards those, with whom he converses, by apprising him of their hostile or friendly dispositions. It will enable him to distinguish lowness of spirits in a friend from ill temper or aversion; and it will often save him the mortification of having mended his pace in the street to meet an old

acquaintance, who seeing him coming up, turns short round a corner.

THERE are, however, certain classes of men, to whom my discovery may be more serviceable than to others. It is sufficiently obvious, that where there is little or no possibility of becoming popular, the instrument can be of little or no use ; as the common Thermometer will not operate under an exhausted receiver, or where there is no ambient air. They, who use my machine, should be placed in conspicuous situations, but must not be altogether independent ; for in such situations they will feel the whole influence of the *aura popularis*. It is necessary, that they should be connected with a numerous society, most of whom are beneath them, or, at best, only on the same level. Were I called upon to recommend a station, it should be either a commission in the Army or Navy, a College Fellowship, or a residence in a Country Town in any public capacity ; and none, perhaps, is more suitable, than that of the Rector or Vicar. A Country Town, however, is at all events, the most convenient situation for one, who studies popularity. There he necessarily has a large acquaintance ; and there he is sure to become food for conversation. Whatever he does or says, nay, almost whatever he thinks, is generally known within a few hours, and always contributes to produce a change in the opinions which have been formed of him.

I SHALL subjoin some *Populo-meteorological Observations* made with my machine in a Borough Town during the space of five weeks, as I find them in my journal.

FIRST WEEK. Came to reside at ***** with good recommendations. At my arrival the fluid in my Thermometer stood at 0; but in 24 hours rose to 25°. Was asked to three dinners and five suppers; fluid still rising. At the end of the week, however, it passed the *point of indifference* and fell to 39°. This change was owing to my having been rather witty on *Mrs. Porpoise*, the fat May-oreess: who ran all over the town to tell her friends, that I was satirical.

SECOND WEEK. During the first part of the week the fluid was in a state of constant agitation, being sometimes at 39° above, and sometimes at 39° below, c. These sudden changes I have frequently observed; in this instance, I believe, they were occasioned by the different characters given of me by *Mrs. Porpoise* and by my advocates; and they are exactly analogous to the effects of stormy weather on the *Barometer*. By the end of the week my popularity was exactly *minus 20°*. I had spoken disrespectfully of an assembly of old ladies, who met every other evening to play at whist, by calling them a *Club*. Fluid still falling.

THIRD WEEK. In the course of 24 hours the fluid was at 57° on the negative side of 0. A very wicked squib had been thrown out against the Town, of which I was the supposed author. It contained some fly insinuations that the inhabitants were none of them conjurers, with several

other ungracious reflections. I immediately wrote a pamphlet disclaiming all knowledge of the obnoxious Paper, and produced a very laboured panegyric on the good sense of the Town in general, together with some handsome compliments on the profound sagacity of the Corporation. By the end of this week fluid had risen to 52° above point of indifference.

FOURTH WEEK. Engaged every day to dine out, in consequence of what had past the preceding week. I was now a wonderful favourite with the great people; but others thought me very proud, owing to the uprightness of my person in walking. Fluid began to fall; but rose higher than ever on its being known that I was a liberal subscriber to a charitable institution; and that it might be no secret, I ordered it to be published in the County News-paper. Fluid stood at 59° on the positive side of o.

FIFTH WEEK. I was now quite happy in being courted and caressed: but on *Monday* being out at a dinner, at which *Mrs. Porpoise* was present, I could not deny myself the pleasure of being at her again. Talking on the subject of female dress, I introduced some remarks on the dangers of tight lacing, and particularly cautioned *Mrs. P.* against that practice, adding that I saw plainly she was squeezed into half her natural compass. She bounced out of the room in a violent rage, and was so indefatigable in persecution, that in two days my popularity was *minus* 47° . The ladies all conspired against me, and by the end of the week had so far brought over their husbands to their own way of thinking, that I was completely *cut*. N. B. When the fluid sinks to 60° , it hardly ever rises again, unless the owner of the instrument change the place of his residence.

THESE *Thermometers* are sold wholesale and retail by the Inventor's Agent, N^o 920, Oxford-street, London, N. B. Great allowance made to Country Dealers. N.B. They will be particularly useful to Members of Parliament, Ministers of State, Methodist Parsons, Petits Maitres, and all who are anxious to discover the degree of their popularity. N. B. Great care must be taken in using them. They must not be forced by adscititious heat, such as bribery, flattery &c. these will cause the fluid to rise at first, but it will soon fall lower than it was before; and the Thermometer will be spoilt.

By publishing this account of my discovery thro' the Counties, in which your excellent paper is read, you will greatly oblige

Your very Humble Servt.

London, Jan. 28, 1793.

Poplicola Merlin.

P.S. My machine, methinks, would be very useful to the *Country Spectator* and to every man, who endeavours to be in favor with the public. Yours &c.

I LIKE my Correspondent's machine exceedingly : but if another tube could be added, which should shew us how far we are in favor with ourselves, it would certainly be no small improvement.

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